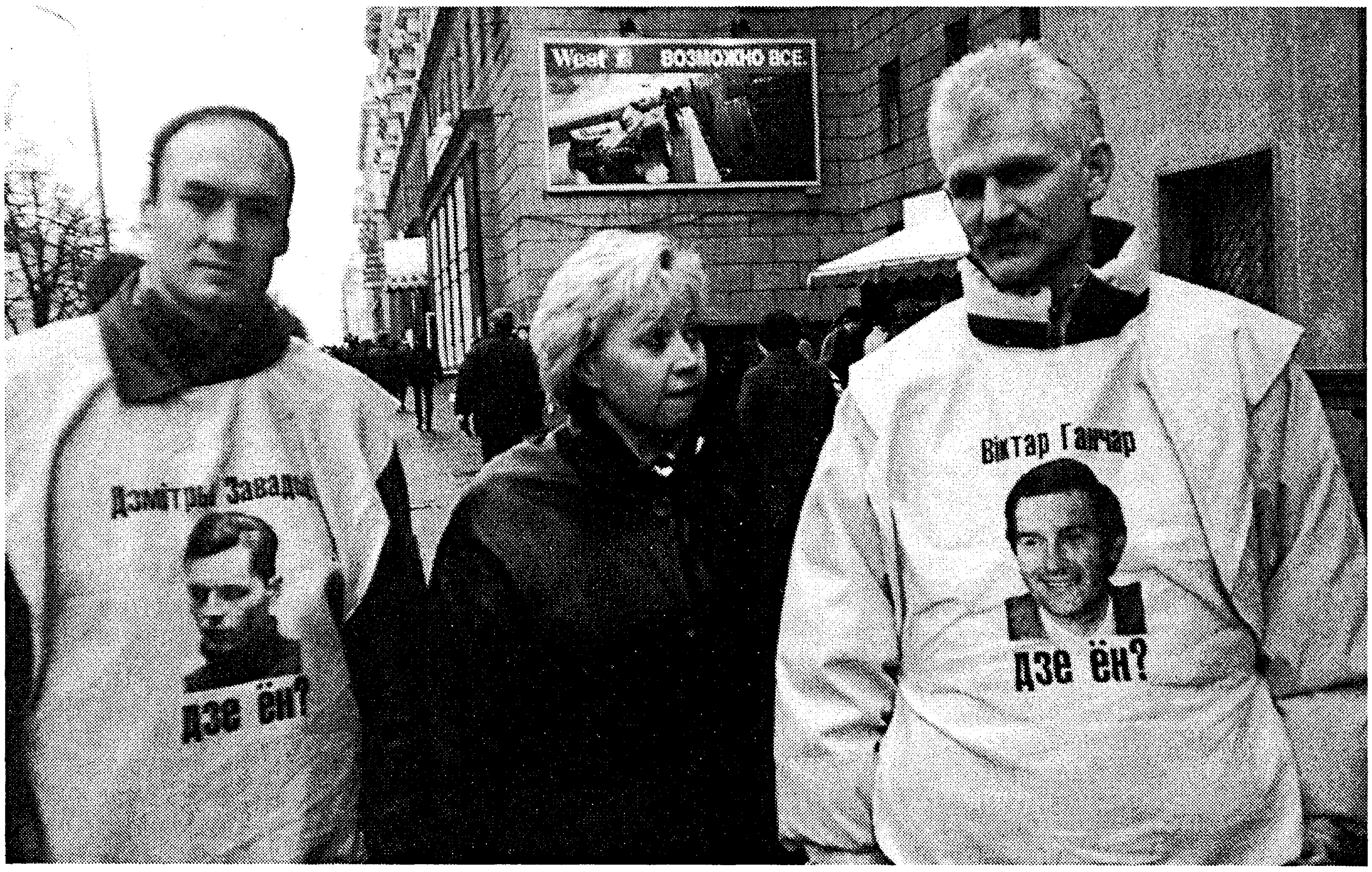
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December 2000

The Right to Freedom

The Bulletin of the Human Rights Centre "Viasna"



KNOW AND REMEMBER...

ON DECEMBER 10 IN 15 BELARUSIAN CITIES AND TOWNS NGOS COMMEMORATED THE 52ND ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS. THE MAJOR AIM OF THE EVENT WAS TO DRAW THE PUBLIC ATTENTION TO THE HUMAN "DISAPPEARANCE" PROBLEM IN BELARUS.

In Miensk the commemoration of the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights began at 12 a.m. in F. Skaryna Avenue. Nearly 150 people gathered at the "Kastrychnitskaya" metro station to march through the city till as far as Independence Square (Ploshcha Niezaliezhnastsi). These were the relatives of the disappeared Belarusian citizens, human rights activists, members of political parties and movements.



The people who had taken part in the event were wearing cloaks of a special design: on one side the cloaks had the words "December 10 – Human Rights Day" while the other side featured portraits of the disappeared – Viktar Hanchar, Yury Zakharanka, Dzmitry Zavadzki, Anatol Krasowski. The march participants were distributing copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Human Rights Center "Viasna" had arranged the event. During the march nothing happened that could be regarded as something disturbing public order, still some participants were detained. At 12.30 near the Miensk Hotel Yuras Ziankovitch i Siarhey Skamieika were arrested. The police officers who had arrested the men told them, explaining the detention, that a flat in the local neighbouhood had been burglarized and that they were suspected of having committed the crime. The detained were taken to the Maskowski District Department of Internal Affairs. The police officers there drew up a report registering the confiscation of the cloaks (both featuring a portrait of Viktar Hanchar) and also made the detained write a paper explaining why they had been in F. Skaryna Avenue at that time.

(to be continued on page 2)

CHRONICLE

On December 1 M. Hutkowski and S. Hupalovitch, members of the Slutsk branch of HRC "Viasna" submitted an application for a picket on December 10 (the day when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted). Their application was refused:

"In conformity with the Law on Gatherings, Meetings, Mass Demonstrations, Street Marches and Pickets " and the 11.11.1998 resolution of the Town Executive Committee (extract #32 from record of proceedings #22):

1. Citizens M. Hutkowski and S. Hupalovitch are allowed to hold a picket at the Education Department Town Stadium on December 10, 2000.
2. M. Hutkowski and S. Hupalovitch shall be responsible for conducting the picket in accordance with the agreed order and taking the appropriate security measures.
3. In conformity with the Statute on the Order of Reimbursing Expenses Incurred by Mass Events the expenses (6 minimal salaries) connected with maintaining public order, the stadium rental shall be paid by December 7, 2000. The documents confirming the payment shall be submitted to the Executive Committee (Room 519) by December 10, 2000. The failure to submit the documents confirming the payment will lead to the ban of the picket on December 10, 2000."

As we may see, the Slutsk authorities compelled the human rights activists to pay the police "work" of "maintaining order". Nothing of the sort has happened since Belarus gained independence.

(to be continued on page 6)

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Know and remember...

(continued from page 1)
All in all, the men had been kept in custody for two hours before they were released.

During the event policemen made continual attempts to detain march participants. So, at 12 a.m. there was an attempt to detain the HRC "Viasna" chair ***Alies Bialiatski*** who was leaving the "Kastrychnitskaya" metro station at that moment. Near the "Tsentralny" movie theatre police officers dressed as civilians demanded that 2 young men who walked wearing the cloaks should produce their documents. Since a lot of journalists were nearby witnessing the incident the police officers had to let the guys go. ***Ludmila Bazhok,*** a "United Civil Party"member, was detained. The woman was made to get into a police car but was released a few minutes later (since there were no grounds for her detention). There was another attempt (at the corner of Valadarskaya Street) to detain some march participants. The attempt, however, failed: citizens witnessing the incident prevented the police arresting the young people.

Brest: 5 were detained during the picket devoted to the Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

All in all, there were 5 submitted applications requesting permission to hold pickets in central areas of the city. The city authorities proposed that 4 applicants join Vasil Barbolin (organiser of one of the pickets) and hold the joint picket at the stadium "Budawnik".

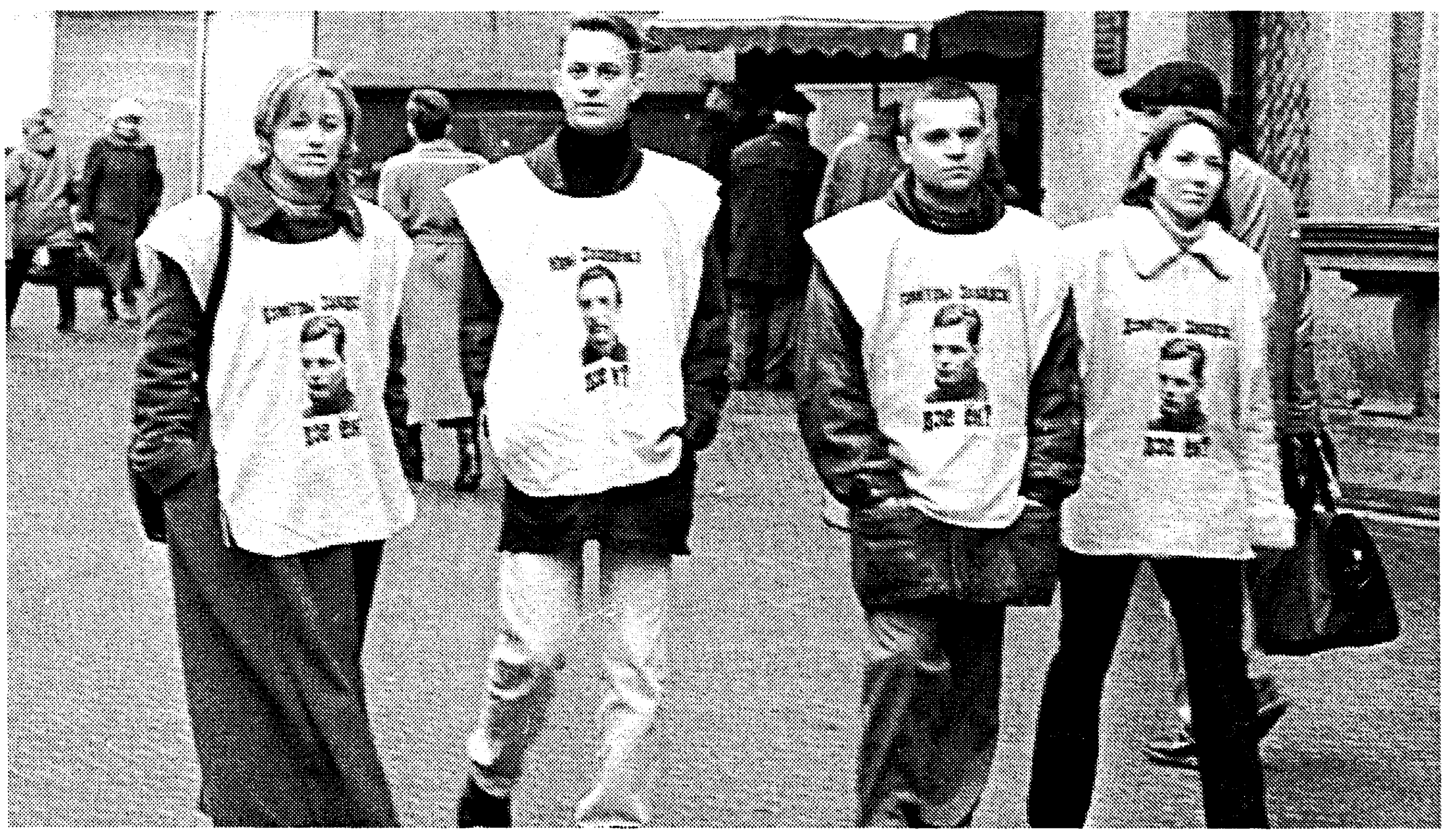
The applicants who had been refused to hold pickets (A. Dydyshka, U. Vialichkin, R. Antaniuk, R. Varvashevitch) considered the City Executive Committee to have violated their civil rights guarantied by Articles 33, 35, 58 of the Belarusian Constitution, so they organized an unauthorized picket near the City Trading Centre (TsUM). The picket lasted from 11.30. till 12.30. Then the police began detaining people. Among the detained were ***Uladzimir Vialichkin, Siarhei Bakhun, Alieh Dydyshka, Yawhen Bielasin, Kiryla Dan'ko.*** The detainees were taken to the Leninski District Department of Internal Affairs where the local policemen drew up administrative reports registering the detention. After that Mr. Kastsiuchyk, head of the District Department of Internal Affairs (DDIA), ordered the detainees to be kept at the Department till the trial. Thus, the Brest human rights activists spent the night in a detention ward.

In Barysaw a picket lasted from 11.30 a.m. till 12.30 a.m.. 15 people took part. They were distributing copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the bulletin "The Right to Freedom", "The Review-Chronicle of Human Rights Violations in Belarus in 1999". At 12.30 a.m. police officers armed by automatics started detaining people. ***Zmitsier Barodka,*** head of the Barysaw branch of the HRC "Viasna" and ***Anatol Askierka*** were detained. There were no reports drawn up to register the detention, the pickets were kept at a police station for 30 minutes and after "a short briefing" were released.

In Vitsiebsk there were 4 detentions on December 10. The people were detained near the Ewdakiya Los monument by individuals dressed as civilians. The pickets were forced into a car and taken to the Chyhunachny District DIA of Vitsiebsk where reports were drawn by the terms of Article 167, Part 2, of the Code for Administrative Infringements (organisation of an unauthorised picket). Among the detained were:

1. ***Aliona Zaleskaya***
2. ***Siarhei Vasienka***
3. ***Anatol Zakharaw***
4. ***Dzianis Muskow***

Harodnia: 3 authorised pickets devoted to the Human Rights Day took place. There were four applications, however one of the pickets was banned and another one was transferred from a central square to a less populated area. One of the pickets took place in the city microdistrict Farty. 8 people took part. There were 20 people taking part in the picket near the Communication House (Dom Suviazi) and more than 30 near the "Kastrychnik" movie theatre. The pickets were distributing among the passers-by copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, fly-sheets featuring information on human rights violations in Belarus. Photographs were demonstrated illustrating the persecution of the Harodnia human rights activists (trials over participants of mass protests and so on).



The December 10 pickets did not lead to any detentions.

However, there were some arrests the day before, on December 9. Young people held a human rights picket in Savetskaya Street. 8 people took part in the picket, they displayed placards with words "Students Are Against the Dictatorship", "We Have the Right to Human Living Conditions", "We Have the Right to Freedom". The picket lasted 30 minutes before it was stopped by police officers who detained 5 people. 4 pickets and an uninvolved passer-by were detained. Reports registering the participation in the picket were drawn up on ***Sviatlana Niekh,*** deputy chair of the Students' Union, and ***Dzianis Mikhalchyk***, chair of the Students' Union. Among the detained were ***Aliesia Sidlierevich,*** a "Pahonia" journalist, and a Polish Socialist Party representative who was searched and deprived of a film that was later exposed to the daily light.

Maladechna: a 200 people meeting organized by the HRC "Viasna" took place in a city park. The people present at the event were given copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the independent press. ***Alies Kaputski*** (HRC "Viasna"), ***Evard Balachuk*** (The Belarusian Helsinki Committee), ***Viacheslaw Siwchyk*** (The Belarusian People's Front "Adradzhennie"), ***Neli Shloyda*** ("Narodnaya Hramada").

Baranavichy: a 10 people authorized picket organized by the HRC "Viasna" took place in Malady Park. The picket was devoted to the anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The people present at the event had a chance to get a copy of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the human rights bulletin "the Right to Freedom" and other independent periodicals.

Kobryn: the town authorities allowed a picket to be held in Marozaw Park, a small public garden in the town centre. The HRC "Viasna" held the picket from 2 p.m. till 4 p.m., 22 took part in the picket (just as many policemen were watching the picket). The pickets were distributing among Kobryn inhabitants copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The official structures have not done anything to commemorate the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, they have not forgotten about the date. In a December 10 programme shown on Belarusian television one could see a person tearing up a copy of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and throwing it into a litter bin.

The Information Department of HRC "Viasna".

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ANATOL PAWLAW:

"ONLY PEOPLE STRUGGLING FOR RIGHTS ENJOY THEM..."

This autumn was peculiar in the sense that more Belarusian citizens as compared with earlier years had started to openly criticise the economic and political situation in the country. University lecturers, school teachers, kindergarten instructors had gained the support of the national trade union upholding its members' claims to better working standards and higher salaries. Our interviewee Anatol Vasilyevitch Pawlaw was last year elected Chairman of the Miensk Organisation for Trade Unions of Scholars and Educators, he commenced his duties on January 1, 2000. The first year of his tenure was far from easy...



Anatol PAWLAW

— Anatol Vasilyevitch, you hold an elected office. How many people are there behind the back of the person chairing an urban organisation?

— The Miensk Organisation of Trade Unions of Scholars and Educators has as many as 115000 members. These are university lecturers and students, school and pre-school employees (including technicians)...

— How good are the relations between the trade unions and the educational establishments administrations?

— Often they try to separate the trade unions and the administrations and even make them clash with each other. I think that if we picture education as a boat lost in the ocean of our economy, the two boat oars will be the administration and the trade union. To come ashore they must join their efforts and row in the same direction.

However, the relations between the administration and the trade unions do not decide everything. Certain changes must take place in the conscience of both ordinary trade union members and trade union leaders. Trade union leaders must realise that it is not the State that pays them salaries but the ordinary members who have entrusted them with the task of guarding their interests. Many find it difficult to re-orient themselves. That wasn't easy for me, either. I have gone through all the stages of the Soviet upbringing: from a young pioneer ("aktsiabronak") to a CPSU member. The ideological pressure was very heavy and even now one is finding it quite difficult to get rid of the "socialistic" complexes.

The main thing is to change the conscience of the ordinary members, to make people understand that trade union's functions are not only those of giving children Christmas presents, summer holidays vouchers. In practice, it is the other way round: the trade union is there for defending employees' rights, ensuring that normal working standards and timely payment of salaries are guaranteed by employers. Our members' rights get continually violated. We are flooded by telephone calls. Miensk is a capital, a city that has a high level of education and, still, there are so many violations of the labour legislation... The educational establishments administrations either do not read laws or act contrary to the laws. These are unlawful dismissals, admonitions. And that's when people remember a trade union that may defend them. Our prime function is to defend the legal rights of the employees. When everyone comes to understand that, people adopt a different attitude to a trade union.

— Given the current situation, how real is it to safeguard the employees' rights?

— Only people struggling for rights enjoy them. Now, if we look at the teachers nation-wide we may see that they are beginning to believe the joint efforts will bear fruit. There appears hope that if we all rally behind a common cause we can change the situation, if we choose to be on our own, nothing will change.

We may keep appealing to the authorities, writing them letters, publishing articles in the press describing the terrible state of the education, but if the majority does not say no to poor salaries, there will be no changes.

— It's not the first year that we hear talks about the alleged increase in the amount of money spent on education...

— Unfortunately, these talks are just what they are – talks. At the beginning of April the Belarusian Vice-Premier Uladzimir Zamiatalin was at our convention. He made a lot of promises. They even worked out the document "Memorandum on commissions for the Belarusian Cabinet of Ministers based on the results of the third convention of the Belarusian Trade Union of Scholars and Educators". By the terms of the memorandum a 1,4 factor for wage rates was to be introduced, salaries of "young specialists" (*university graduates having to do compulsory jobs provided by the State in order to reimburse the education-related expenses*) were to be increased by 20%; student stipends were planned to reach the 50% level of a "living minimum" (*an amount of money thought of as sufficient to cover all the necessary expenditures*); shorter working hours for pre-school employees were planned; a bonus payment fund was to be increased. It's December – however, nothing has been done.

On October 13 at the expanded presidium of the Miensk Organisation we decided that a written application containing educators' economic demands should be sent to the Presidential Administration and the Cabinet of Ministers. What are our demands?

First of all, we want the full implementation of the Law of the Republic of Belarus "On Education in the Republic of Belarus" (of 13.11.1999, amended and expanded) and of the state programme "Educator" worked out by the Ministry of Education of the RB and approved of by the Belarusian Cabinet of Ministers resolution #313 of February 27, 1998.

Citing the RB law "On Education in the Republic of Belarus":

"*Article 34.*

Educators are entitled to:

...a guaranteed level of payments regularly amended in accordance with changes in the prices index, differentiated payment depending on the qualification and the results of one's activities as an educator. The average salary of an educator is fixed at the level of an industry worker's average salary, and the average salary of university lecturers and professors is to be at least 1,5 times higher than that of an industry worker.

Article 37.

...the development of the RB education system with a view of preserving and enhancing the Republic's intellectual potential is funded by the State in the amount of 10% of the GDP; extra budget revenues may enable a further increase in payments".

(*to be continued on page 7*)

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A CHAIN OF INSULTS AND LEGAL OUTRAGES

The "Gay-Pride", a festival of sexual minorities, took place in September in Miensk. Unfortunately, the organisers failed to carry out everything they had planned. The Belarusian authorities adopted a very hostile attitude towards the festival participants and banned most of the scheduled events. Obvious reasons prevented the Belarusian press from covering the festival to the full extent. That's why "The Right to Freedom" offers its readers a true story of the events, of how the Belarusian authorities fought with the citizens and city guests.

The "Gay-Pride" was devoted to the second anniversary of "Forum Lambda" – the first periodical of the Belarusian gays and lesbians. However, it was not only gays and lesbians that took an interest in the four day events. Some were attracted by dance parties at all-nighters, some by model shows arranged by young fashion designers, some by performances, films, photo exhibitions... The festival sponsors had planned concerts of the Belarusian stars (e.g. "Kryvi", Ina Afanasyeva) and foreign singers. Apart from entertainment, the festival had planned a number of awareness-raising workshops devoted to the position of gays and lesbians in Europe and the culture of sexual minorities, a number of articles in the press, etc. Nothing that could be considered as "an insult of the public taste". The festival brochure had clearly indicated which of the events (performances or films) should not be viewed by minors. Famous Belarusian singers, FM-station DJs, actresses, fashion designers, journalists had agreed to be part of a jury at the male strip-tease tournament and the beauty contest... A feast for gays and lesbians and another holiday for the rest! It did not turn out that way, however.

The first event to be banned was the festival parade scheduled to take place in Miensk central streets on September 10. The procession had been planned from the Opera House down M. Bahdanovitch Street till as far as Banhalor Square (it's there that the capital authorities have recently allowed the opposition to hold their events). Nevertheless, both "Lambda" and "Forum" had not excluded the possibility that the Miensk Executive Committee would ban the parade. The "Gay-Pride" brochure had given an advance warning that the procession and the concert at Banhalor Square would take place provided "the weather keeps fine and the city authorities give their consent". Tsina Klykowskaya, the press-service director, said that it had been decided to do nothing contrary to the possible restrictions. "We would not like our people and foreign guests to be crippled by the police batons", - explained Ts. Klykowskaya.

Only two films and two workshops took place on September 7 as had been planned. At 10 p.m. a lot people gathered at the night club "Aquarium". Waiting for the show to begin, the spectators danced at the discotheque. At midnight the disco was over to be followed by "the thunder". First, the "Lambda" leader Edvard Tarlietski and the "Forum" editor Tsina Klykowskaya in voices of a Santa Claus and a Snow Maiden addressed the audience with a humorous speech. The show-ballet dancers put up in the hall a huge rainbow flag – a symbol of the sexual minorities world-wide. When the next part of the show began, the lights suddenly went out. The spectators and the participants thought for a while that it was an "ordinary" malfunction. The organisers were starting to have doubts that it was just a "malfunction". Approximately an hour before the "Aquarium" administration had asked the cameramen and the newspaper journalists to leave the hall. Aliaxandr Asmalowski, the club director, warned the journalists against saying that they had been forced out. He said that "one is not allowed to take pictures here", because at night clubs it is forbidden to use photo or video cameras. However, Tsina Klykowskaya, the spokesperson for the festival, told the "Right to Freedom" correspondent that the agreed contract provided for the terms under which photo and video cameras might be used. With the lights off, the hosts were still trying to keep the audience calm and entertained: from time to time they used lighters to disperse the darkness. Meanwhile, a few people left for "the talks" with Mr. Asmalowski, the club director. He said that the show schedule had to be changed, and the lights went off because of the night club administration's directive: the management had ostensibly found it offensive the hoisting of the sexual minorities flag. Before that, Mr. Asmalowski had been blissfully unaware of who he had been having dealings with and what kind of event was going to take place at "the Aquarium". Notwithstanding that the show had already been rehearsed on the night club stage and the show dancers had once put up the rainbow flag there before...

When the director was caught lying, the festival organisers understood what the true reasons were. When the surprised foreign guests (Swedes, Russians, Poles) started asking questions, the answer was that the state is obviously behind it all. Edvard Tarlietski asked the numerous spectators to leave "the Aquarium". As soon as he said that, the lights went on. The club security gave the people 10 minutes to leave the all-nighter. Hurriedly, the people were taking their belongings from the cloakroom; pushed into their backs by the security, the show organisers were tearing the sponsors' posters off the walls. Outside, a lot of policemen had already gathered. They paid no attention to some unidentified young men attempting to take advantage of the people's spoiled mood. They started cursing them obviously willing to provoke a fight or some rudeness. However, the incitement brought about no results (maybe, due to the self-control of Edvard Tarlietski and his friends no one had been detained). The commentary made by the policemen could be characterised as insults and resembled a set of phrases used to zombie the voters. When the "Lambda" leader offered some of his friends living on the city outskirts money for a taxi, "law enforcement" officers angrily recalled the Soros Foundation and Zianon Pazniak and the CIA: "This is the money from your top fags". And that wasn't the strongest expletive used that night...

The next Friday new problems cropped up. At 12 a.m., just before the press-conference, the "Gay-Pride" press-centre located in the office of the public organisation "United Path" had a telephone call from the police. The caller said that posters, magazines and other festival-related items were to be removed from the office within 10 minutes. As well as the festival organisers, guests and the over-curious journalists. Otherwise, the



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caller added, a special police squad would arrive and vacate the office. The organisers wanted no extremities. Thus, the festival was deprived of its press-centre. Because of this the foreign guests were afraid to hold on that day their workshops in the House of Culture of the Association of the Hearing-Impaired People. "We came to give lectures and not to struggle with the Belarusian authorities", - they said. Nonetheless, many art and psychology students took a great interest in the lectures on the erotic industry in Poland given by the Polish guest, editor of several popular periodicals. Soon the Miensk journalists learnt about what had happened to the press-centre. As a result, the House of Culture (HC) in Uralskaya Street was overcrowded. The police did not let anyone in and ordered the organisers to make the people leave the building. Provided the organisers mean no harm for the gathered people... So the organisers could do nothing but spread among the present copies of "Forum" and the "Gay-Pride" posters and ask them to leave. All of this was videoed by some people dressed as civilians. "First, I did not notice a white car near the HC. Some young people were in it, one was filming my colleague and me, - says Tsina Klykowskaya. – I approached the car and asked the young men what they were. If they are KGB agents then it is their job to film us. And what if they are bandits or some nazi-like nationalists whose attitudes towards gays are well-known?" Her question was left unanswered: "the guys clothed as civilians" did not utter a word as though they were from the Association of both the Hearing-Impaired and Speech-Challenged People.

The "United Path" office staff continued to receive calls from the law enforcement agencies. Alitsyia Shybitskaya, a leader of the organisation, was threatened with annulment of the lease. One can view as an element of psychological pressure the problems that the "United Path" office staff had making telephone calls: they were not infrequently disconnected. "The telephone pressure" of the kind is, unfortunately, a hallmark of the Belarusian reality at the threshold of the XXI century.

The festival organisers fell into the trap of information isolation. They decided to ask democratic parties to let them use their headquarters for a press-conference. Little hope did they have that such a permission would be granted: the country is on the eve of going to the polls and the Belarusian people's attitudes towards gays are mostly negative. The Belarusian Social Democratic Party "Narodnaya Hramada", however, made their office available to the fugitives.

The hopes that the feast would continue were dying away. The next stage was the night club "Reactor". The admission tickets to the contest "Transmisiya", each costing $3-5, had been sold out long before. The organisers had spent several days futilely attempting to get in touch with the "Reactor" management. The situation was uncertain and vague. Finally, A. Radzivilaw, the club art-director, said that the "Gay-Pride" would damage the club's prestige. No one believed Mr. Radzivilaw was sincere saying that. When on Friday the participants and the spectators came to the "Reactor" they saw dark windows and closed doors. The organisers did not find any entertainment centre employees but a waitress who said the director had ordered everyone to stay home. Even the watchman was not there so that no one could give information about why the show had been banned... Getting ahead of the story, I want to say that 3 discotheques within the "Gay-Pride" had taken place at a Miensk all-nighter the owner of which had decided to give gays and their guests the free of charge opportunity to enjoy themselves. The closure of the festival had also taken place there, though not featuring the prepared concert and fashion show. The club simply does not meet the necessary technical requirements.

On Saturday the rumours spread that the foreign guests' workshops would be transferred outdoors and take place in a park next to the "Zmiena" movie theatre. The curious gathered there and sat down on the grass. Nadzia Nartava, leader of the St-Petersburg sexual minorities movement, and Bill Schiller, a Swedish journalist, leader of the gays and lesbians' culturological organisation, took the floor. The speeches given after the bans and prejudices of the recent days were charged with emotion. They recalled: today is September 9, the Remembrance Day for Victims of the Fascist Genocide. Nadzia Nartava reminded that in fascist concentration camps gays and lesbians were killed separately from others. It was decided to buy flowers and lay them at the Independence Square obelisk. The representatives of the six countries were laying flowers and explaining to the passers-by the sense of the happening when the already familiar cars with the civilly-dressed cameramen arrived at the square.

The Sunday farewell press-conference was again held outdoors, next to the Maxim Bahdanovitch monument. Edvard Tarlietski, the "Lambda" leader, explained the choice: "Bahdanovitch is a symbol of the Belarusian nation, his death was caused not so much by his illnesses but by the inability of the Belarusian community to understand him".

The foreign guests were shocked by what they had seen in Belarus. All the participants went home with a weight in their soul. The spectators had paid the money but seen hardly any of the promised shows, the organisers had incurred both financial and moral losses. And those who have nothing to do with either gays or the festival got a feeling that today the authorities got to these people, tomorrow they would abuse others, the day after tomorrow a chain of insults and legal outrages would come to your home – to everyone's house, even to those who have seemingly never been involved in anything.

Tatsiana SNITKO.

***P.S.* The Belarusian authorities used the festival of the sexual minorities to tell once again outrageous lies about the opposition referred to as "a political minority" (the analogies drawn here can only be understood by the authorities). The unknown cameramen mentioned by Ts. Klykowskaya did not work in vain: literally a few days later on the National television a film was shown which used video techniques of parallel editing and frame overlapping to equate homosexuals and the opposition leaders, and the English (or Dutch, Swedish – it's not important) gays marched with white-red-white flags in their hands... That was the way the authorities had chosen to demonstrate their attitude towards sexual minorities (rather than the opposition) as outcasts in our society: totalitarianism, regardless of its origins – German, Soviet or Belarusian, always has the same face...**

REVENGE FOR "LIES"?

IN ASIPOVITCHI (MAHILIOW REGION) POLICEMEN ASSAULTED THE JOURNALISTS OF THE LOCAL INDEPENDENT PERIODICAL "PANARAMA", THE AIM WAS TO INTIMIDATE AND INSULT THEM.

Asipovitchi, December 12, 2000: a private flat in 16 Sumchanki Street was broken into by several policemen (among them was Siarhey Babakow, the Asipovitchy District Procurator). At that time in the flat were Mikalay Tamashow (editor of the regional independent newspaper "Panarama" with a circulation of 295 copies) and Ihar Simbiraw (a "Panarama" journalist publishing the articles under the name of Ryhor Latyshevitch, coordinator of the programme "the Kingdom of Belarus"). It's worthwhile to mention that the flat in Sumchanki Street is not the office of "Panarama", it is the property of I. Simbiraw's friend who allows Simbiraw to use the flat during his absence. That's why the flat had at that time a computer (USIA equipment) that I. Simbiraw used for his work.

The policemen began the search. They showed the warrant and said that the "lies" published in the paper initiated a criminal case. The policemen failed to specify the "Panarama" article allegedly containing "lies". I. Simbiraw's assumption is it may be an article featuring a speech of Mr. Shchetska, the Asipovitchy District Administration leader, at a Miensk market. The speech was recorded on a Dictaphone and published in the paper with the following comment added: "an official must have a good command of the language".

During the search the policemen insulted I. Simbiraw calling him a "clown", senior lieutenant Yury Hrabin wrung I. Simbiraw's hand and broke the bridge of his nose, dislocated a finger and broke the watch.

As a result of the search more than 100 documents were confiscated, among them were 51 sheets printed from a computer (stories). The report registering the confiscation wasn't drawn up in the flat but in the Procurator's office. The flat was sealed off. M. Tamashow and I. Simbiraw were taken to the Procurator's office to be interrogated for a long time. The policemen asked mostly these questions: "Who funds "Panarama"? "Where does the computer come from?" I. Simbiraw refused to answer these questions without a lawyer.

P. STSIEPANIENKA.

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EVENTS FACTS COMMENTS

(continued from page 1)

On December 4 it became known that our Swedish friends had launched a campaign to collect signatures under the appeal to Aliaxandr Lukashenka. 124 Swedish parliamentarians signed the petition after Pavel Sheremet's film "Wild Hunt" had been shown on the Swedish television (November 26 and 28, 2000). The Swedish MPs expressed their concern over the fate of the people who had disappeared in Belarus from May 7, 1999, to July 7, 2000: they are Yury Zakharanka, Viktar Hanchar, Anatol Krasowski, Dzmitry Zavadzki... The Swedish parliamentarians hope that the "disappearances" will be thoroughly investigated and the results will be made available to the public. The petition will be handed over to the Belarusian ambassador to Sweden provided 1000 people put their signatures under it. The petition campaign will continue till December 19. The complete text of the petition you may find at www.vitryssland.nu

On December 5 a regular session of the Supreme Economic Court of the RB took place. The subject of the court sitting was the suit brought by the institution "Open Society" against the Miensk Leninski District Fiscal Inspectorate. The court considered the legality of sequestration of the printing equipment belonging to the publishing company "Magic". Earlier the equipment in question was property of the Soros Foundation that the Supreme Economic Court adjudicated tax delinquent in 1997. Three years later the Leninski District Fiscal Agency seized the "Magic" equipment under the pretext of covering the debts of the Soros Foundation. The publishing company "Magic" immediately submitted the documents confirming its ownership of the equipment. At the beginning it was owned by the institution "Open Society" which then passed it over to the publishing company on the lease basis. Also we should remind that the main reason for the sequestration was that the equipment is used to publish independent Belarusian periodicals and it was there that 100000 copies of the newspaper "Rabochy" featuring articles on the boycott of the Lukashenka Parliament election were confiscated... The legal proceedings were postponed. The Supreme Economic Court failed to reach a decision on the suit, as "a representative of the Belarusian Soros Foundation was present in the court". But how could he be there if the Belarusian authorities banned the Soros Foundation back in 1997...

December 5, The Supreme Court considered the appeal of Chyhir's attorneys and the appeal protest of the procurator. The court chamber that considered the case consisted of the Supreme Court judges Kashko, Korzun and Chemrukow. The procurator Yurkievich, an employee of the Procurator General's office, led prosecution. Attorney Aliaxandr Pylchanka, Yuliya Chyhir and Barys Hiunter (the representative of "Viasna") conducted defence. The trial began at 9 a.m. and was finished at 3 p.m. Mikhail Chyhir and all the representatives of his defence were the first to take the floor. Producing solid evidence, they proposed that the Supreme Court should abolish the sentence of the city court and vindicate Chyhir from a charge. The prosecution had a very short speech, asking to send the case back to the city court for new consideration.

The Supreme Court took the arguments of the defence into consideration and concluded that the case materials do not provide enough evidence to adjudge Chyhir guilty. The Supreme Court abolished the sentence of the City Court and sent the case materials to the Procurator General's office for supplementary investigation.

The human rights activists said they were strongly determined to commemorate the Human Rights Day and that on ***December 10*** Miensk would witness an extraordinary celebration.

As we had earlier informed you "Viasna" had applied for permission to conduct a picket in the center of the city, devoted to the Human Rights Day, on December 10. The Miensk City Executive Committee did not permit to organise a picket in the city centre and, as usual, let the organisers conduct the picket at Banhalor Square. The human rights activists could not be satisfied with such a decision. "Viasna" wrote a letter to the City Executive Committee where it refused to celebrate the anniversary of the Human Rights Declaration on the city outskirts. In this letter "Viasna" says: "The reason for our refusal is that the decision of the City Executive Committee flagrantly violates Article 35 of the Constitution and the international agreements. The pickets are sent to the "dog ground", although the sense of picketing is lost there. The Dictionary of the Standard Belarusian Language defines a "picket" as "a group of people that stands somewhere with an aim of demonstrating their civil protest, voicing their demands (strikers' picket, pickets near the Parliament building)".

At the same time the human rights activists did not give up the idea of celebrating the Human Rights Day properly. They decided to organise an extraordinary performance in the centre of Miensk.

On December 7, the Slutsk city court considered the administrative case of Aliaxandr Katliarow, military pensioner, who was charged with organisation of an unauthorised meeting in Slutsk (which was one of the events planned for the National March of Freedom campaign). Judge Natallia Khaladok announced her decision: a fine of 150 minimal salaries (about $450). Aliaxandr Katliarow was threatened that his property would be confiscated in case he did not pay the fine within 2 days after the sentence was announced. This is an evident violation of law. By the terms of Article 286 of the Code of Administrative Infringements, the fine is to be paid within 15 days after the court decision was presented to the person. Besides, Article 287 says that the property is the subject to confiscation only if a person does not get any salary, or pension. Alaxander Katlarow receives his pension, so the fine should be extracted from that money, according to the regulations laid down in the Code of Civil Procedures (20% monthly).

Katliarow intends to appeal against this decision at the Miensk Region Court.

On December 9 in Brest 4 out of 5 Human Rights Day pickets were banned. All in all, there were 5 submitted applications requesting permission to hold pickets in central areas of the city. Alieh Dydyshka had planned to hold a picket in Lievaniewski Street, Uladzimir Vialichkin in T. Shawchenka Boulevard, Raisa Antaniuk in Partyzanski Avenue, Ryhor Varvashevitch in Budzionny Street. But the City Executive Committee refused these applications. The trouble was that these streets usually have large numbers of people who may through the pickets learn about their rights and even get a Russian or a Belarusian copy of (and then read) the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The city authorities proposed that 4 applicants join Vasil Barbolin (organiser of one of the pickets) and hold the joint picket at the stadium "Budawnik" where there would be no one to get copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A. Dydyshka, U. Vialichkin, R. Antaniuk, R. Varvashevitch consider that the City Executive Committee violates their civil rights, Articles 33, 35, 58 of the RB Constitution, as well as Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

On December 11 at the BPF "Adradzhennie" headquarters a press-conference was held, devoted to the results of the Human Rights Day protests carried out all over Belarus on December 10. Among the participants were human rights activists, members of the public committees investigating the human "disappearances" in Belarus.

At the beginning of December it became known that Zmitsier Abadowski, a prisoner at the Mahiliow Investigative Detention Ward, stopped his hunger-strike. That wasn't his first attempt to draw the public attention to his personality. Zmitsier Abadowski has been kept in detention for 17 months but the prosecution has not collected enough evidence to prove him guilty of the rape. Independent monitors and Zmitsier's father Siarhey Abadowski, a famous Mahiliow human rights activist, contend that the Z. Abadowski case is an attempt to influence the position of S. Abadowski, an organiser of last year's alternative presidential election. By the way, two years ago after the persecution for having taken part in the opposition-led protests the other son of S. Abadowski – Ivan – had to claim political asylum in Poland. Zmitsier Abadowski stopped the hunger-strike after his eyesight and hearing started to quickly deteriorate and he was transferred from the isolation ward into an ordinary cell.

Information Department, HRC "Viasna"

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"Only People Struggling for Rights Enjoy Them..."

(*continued from page 3*)
The State is us, the Belarusians. The State apparatus is officials who are obliged to fulfil certain State functions. However, the law is not being implemented. The 2001 budget plans to spend on education by 0,1% less than a year before, that is 5,9% of the entire budget. The figure laid down in the law is 10%.

The Belarusian 2000 budget planned BRB 128208 mln to spend on the law enforcement agencies, and BRB 95638 mln on the education system. The 2001 budget has increased law enforcement agencies expenses to BRB 280 billion, while the education will only get BRB 200 billion. However, the numbers of people employed in either sector are incomparable.

It is not normal when a police sergeant's salary is larger than that of a university professor. Meanwhile, the crime rate in Belarus is on the increase. It makes one think if the budget has an appropriate break-up of the expenses. Education and upbringing are long-lasting processes incapable of bringing about immediate results. But if now we fail to understand that the road we have taken is leading nowhere, we shall find it still more difficult to get back to a normal road.

Let's take a look at the State programme "Educator". It says: "it is necessary to ensure that school teachers' average salaries reach the level of industry workers' average salaries, and university lecturers and professors' salaries be at least 1,2 times larger than the aforementioned level". The deadline for these figures to be reached was the beginning of 2000. The year is at its end, and the State programme is still not implemented.

— The trade union consists of both teachers, lecturers and technicians.

— The salaries of the technicians leave a lot to be desired. For example, a kindergarten cook's salary from October 1 is BRB 11000 (USD 10). The inspections show that kindergarten cooks fail to comply with the recipe norms prescribed. There are no wrong ideas about the true reasons. Isn't this a proof of the State having put them into this position: they have to live and feed their families. Give them a normal salary – and they'll stop stealing foodstuffs. What do we have? A state official puts a worker into the circumstances that make him steal if he wants to survive. On the one hand, there is hardly an official that doesn't understand this, on the other hand – no official measures are taken to change the situation.

— What is the solution?

— Culture and education are the spiritual health of a nation. The current attitudes towards health explains why it is so bad. Education and upbringing take much time and financial investment. We are told the budget doesn't have much to spend on education. But that's not true. It is necessary to stop building the structures no one needs, holding unnecessary festivals, cut down on the number of various comptrollers – all these measures will provide for education. It is necessary to think of how to break up the budget expenses correctly. One should not carry on deciding state problems at the expense of the education sector. You can't keep pressing the spring all the time, once you will reach the limit... It is apparent. Last academic year the Miensk schools needed as many as 140 "young specialists", and more than 1000 by September 1, 2000. Considering that school teachers are mostly pensioners and students. More than 100 Candidates of Science and 20 PhDs left the Belarusian State University. These figures show that fewer people want to work at schools and universities. The situation isn't far from critical. And that's how things are in the capital. The situation in the province is still worse.

— It's several weeks already that the Miensk pressure group has been collecting signatures under the petition requiring the authorities to see to the problems of the education system. Any results?

— A lot of school and pre-school workers have signed it. The overall Miensk figure is 30000. University employees are less active. They have extra-budget funds so their material standing is better. Besides, a university lecturer may take a part-time job at a non-state university.

— The petition has it that if by the end of 2000 the authorities fall short of implementing the legislation to the full extent, you feel entitled to "defending your rights by any lawful measures". What do you mean?

— People make written comments on the petition sheets, making it clear that they are prepared to actively defend their position. These are meetings, strikes. People are prepared to go out into streets, leave their workplaces.

— What do you think would be the authorities' reaction to the demands voiced by educators and scholars?

— If I were in the authorities' place, I would give much serious thought to the situation. I would find a solution. A year ago, this activity would have been impossible but now it's evident this is the limit. The people can't stand it any longer. To survive, most work long hours. Plus the time spent home preparing for lessons, plus their own families...and a day has only 24 hours. The extra-work has a negative impact on the overall moral and physical condition of the people. We have a physical training teacher working 104 hours weekly, or a music teacher having 51 hours of lessons every week. What do we punish the people for? That's hard labour rather than work based on creative quest. People do not work just as much in any other sector of the economy.

Article 42 of the Belarusian Constitution says: "employed people are guaranteed a fare share of material reward for the work done. The payment depends on how well the work is done, on the amount of services produced and the public significance of the work. However, the material reward shall not be less than is necessary to provide employed people and their families with humane living conditions."

What is "the public significance of teachers" if we are so badly paid? Then it is necessary to say that our country doesn't need any education system. You can't abuse people's patience non-stop. Once again I would like to underscore that we are prepared to use any legal means to struggle for our rights.

Interviewed by Leanarda MUKHINA



On December 6 *a delegation of the Trade Union of Educators and Scholars consisting of Tamara Chobatava, chair of the National Trade Union, Anatol Pawlaw, chair of the Miensk city organisation, Natallia Minina, a member of the Trade Union Central Committee, and others met with Uladzimir Yarmoshyn, Belarusian Prime-Minister. At the meeting also were A. Kabiakow, first Vice-Premier, Ul. Strazhaw, the Minister for Education, I. Zayash, Deputy Minister for Finance, and some other incumbents of the Belarusian Cabinet of Ministers.*

At the meeting the Prime-Minister was given on behalf of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Trade Union the petition containing the major demands. It was signed by 167974 educators and scholars all over the country.

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Zinaida Hanchar:

"I see no results of the investigation..."

The rigid confrontation between the regime and the opposition forces resulted in mysterious disappearances of the opposition activists – Viktar Hanchar, Yury Zakharanka, the businessman Anatol Krasowski. The list of the kidnapped was expanded this summer by one more name – the journalist Dzmitry Zavadski. This dangerous tendency is a matter of great concern for the community, however it's the families of the disappeared that are suffering most. Tatsiana Reviaka, the "Right to Freedom" correspondent, met with Viktar Hanchar's wife Zinaida HANCHAR and asked her to answer a number of questions.



Zinaida HANCHAR

— ***What was your first reaction when you had learnt about the disappearance of Viktar?***

— That was a shock. I could not have imagined it in my worst nightmare, though the mechanism of pressure had already been on for a long time. I thought that Viktar might be put in prison or something of the sort, but that he might be kidnapped – I did not expect. That was a real blow for my son.

What is worst of all is that nobody is looking for the kidnapped people. They are trying to make us think that whatever is going on is part of the master's plan, and that you have to adapt yourself to the circumstances. A human having to live under such conditions seems to switch on some kind of defence mechanisms. You get the impression that acting this way they are trying to break a human, turn him into a speechless beast – keep your mouth shut, that's necessary. That's a shame that so few people are trying to fight this, because tomorrow it's the silent one who will be "bashed".

— ***Has anyone supported you since Viktar disappeared and who?***

— The international structures were the first to pay attention to the problem. Many friends and colleagues who had earlier come to our place gave me no support that I counted on. I made regular requests last year that before the opposition started negotiating with Lukashenka, they first had to make him release the disappeared and only then begin the talks. My opinion was that so long as nothing was revealed about the disappeared it would be immoral to sit with Lukashenka at the negotiating table.

— ***There is an official investigation of your husband's disappearance going on, a criminal case was initiated. How well are you informed about the legal procedures?***

— It's true that the criminal case was initiated on September 20, 1999. Many times did I have to give evidence, I often had "off the record" conversations with the fact-finding officers. I had the impression that because of the strong dependence of all law enforcement agencies on one person, these people had to work under pressure and they fell short of accomplishing their duties as they are legally obliged. That's why I see no results of the investigation Nevertheless, I am sure that the Procurator's office has well-trained staff and as soon as the situation in the country changes, all the crimes connected with the disappearance of the opposition politicians and the journalist Zavadski will be solved.

On my part I want once again to assure that as before I am prepared to cooperate with the fact-finding bodies in solving the crime.

— ***The first person to disappear was Yury Zakhraranka. Were your families on friendly terms?***

— I did not know Yury well. He had been to our place several times, but only bad luck brought me and his wife together. When Zakharenka disappeared she first telephoned Hanchar. Some time later I asked Volha why was it that she gave the first phone call to Viktar rather than to Yury's closer friends. She said that only Viktar might do something really helpful in that situation.

— ***This year your son entered the Law Institute. Did he have any problems passing the exams?***

— No, he didn't. Just as he didn't have any at school. I had the impression that when it all happened the teachers even acted towards him more leniently than usual. He is lucky to be surrounded by intelligent and commendable people.

— ***More than a year passed... When was it worst of all: when it happened, a month later or now?***

— Now. The more time passes, the worse it gets. I first thought that everything was going to be settled soon, now I am finding it more and more difficult to wait for good news. I live hoping that everything will be soon over, that things can't be always just as bad. I will not believe that they are going to keep us uninformed indefinitely. I just do not dare think of Viktar as dead. Viktar's mother and his relatives are feeling the same way. There are many different versions, but I always proceed from an assumption that the kidnappers are also people. A person might be declared the worst enemy but still, it is a deadly sin murdering a human. The kidnapped have families, wives, children. And what might the reasons be for committing this hateful crime? Fighting for some ideas? Who against?

— ***After Tamara Vinnikava appeared to be safe and sound, there is an opinion widespread in society that if you search hard enough, Hancha-r and the other disappeared might well be found in one of the Western countries.***

— Let them search! I always say: search. That's what I demand to be done. because I know: Viktar could not have left his son and me without informing about his whereabouts when possible. We are a united family and that simply is out of question. Sometimes I am asked: maybe there has been some news? If there'd been some I would have gone where it came from – West, East, prison, vault or elsewhere. You may say whatever you want to, but try and place yourself in my position and your perceiving of the situation will change.

As for Vinnikava, I am glad for her: the woman has been found, thanks God. One should not be insinuating. We do not know all the circumstances, but one day we'll know the truth.

— ***Have your life principles and attitudes to people changed since what happened?***

— A sort of spring-cleaning has happened in my life. I have crossed many things out of my life. This concerns people who I used to receive in my house and who has never come to me and ask what my problems are, if I need any help, since Viktar was kidnapped. This should not be like this. You should not forget that what happened to Hanchar a year ago might well happen to other politicians who also have wives, children, who would also be expecting some help.

You often hear: "politics is a dirty business", given the current situation in Belarus you may paraphrase the expression: "politics is a dangerous business".

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Address: 220013, Minsk, p/b 49. E-mail:viasna@spring96.org www. spring96.org

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